Doctor Says Noise Brings Breakdowns

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LONDON—Aircraft noise could be a final factor in bringing on mental illness. Dr. Colin Herridge, a consultant psychiatrist at the Springfield Hospital, South London, has found that admissions are significantly greater in the high-decibel areas of Hounslow bordering on London's Heathrow Airport.

At the out-patient clinic of a hospital in Hounslow—within the noisy area which he studied — Dr. Herridge says he finds that he has to suspend conversation with patients for 10 seconds every two minutes during the peak arrival time on Runway 1.

He finds that the noise, "like an aircraft coming in one window and going out the other," makes him irritable and short with patients. Both doctor and patient build up aggression.

His two-year survey — not based on his consultations—recorded that in noisy areas 26 persons were admitted when the statistical expectation was 18.6. In areas of less noise, admissions were 17 against an expected 24.

Men were relatively unaffected by noise, but women over 45 were particularly susceptible, and more so if they were not living with their husbands. Among women in this category there were 96 admissions — 21 more than expected.

Dr. Herridge's research is reported in "Noise," the British journal of audiology. Dr. Herridge is seeking funds to carry out further research into the physiological effects of aircraft noise on people of differing psychological makeup.

He believes noise can affect people in three main ways: loss of sleep; the evocation of primeval fear by jet engines whose scream resembles a cry of distress or pain, and the unconscious expectation that, since take-off and landing are the most dangerous moments in flight, an aircraft will crash.